



Wally and Nick in the Shaw-Pezzo showroom with a 19th Century bust of Napoleon from Sothebys, New York.

By Wallace Shaw and Nick Pezzo

Masterpiece theatre

Accessories rich in history bring timeless touches of elegance to your home.

Edith Wharton is well known for her literary works such as *The Age of Innocence* and *The House of Mirth*, but what is not as widely known is that she is considered one of America's first interior designers. Her book, *The Decoration of Houses*, which she co-authored with noted architect Ogden Codman in 1897, established her as an arbiter of taste, with a particular mastery of the Renaissance as well as 16th to 18th century designs. Wharton approached decorating a home with the same attention to detail she gave to the richly developed characters in her novels. She felt that décor accessories were essential in establishing a dwelling's personality and charm.

Elsie de Wolfe, a notable contemporary of Wharton's, was one of the first designers to appreciate and promote the understanding that one's home interior should elegantly and graciously establish his or her identity and

define him or her culturally. Today, accessorizing one's home is a key step in the decorating process. Like everyone, our clients are drawn to pieces for different reasons. From our experiences, we have gathered treasures from around the world which appeal to diversified tastes and fulfill the needs of many discerning collectors.

The thrill of the search

Marjorie Merriweather Post is a good example of someone who understood the allure of creating her own collection. As a young woman, she spent time in New York with the Fricks, the Vanderbilts and the Whitneys, with whom she acquired a taste for collecting. In particular, the Post Cereal heiress was drawn to Russian decorative arts. She and her husband Joseph E. Davies, the American ambassador to the Soviet Union in the late '30s, collected Russian icons, textiles, porce-

lains and art. "Collecting can be a most rewarding and exciting affair; but first of all a particular interest in an article or period must be established to instigate the desire to collect," Post said. "Once the desire is there and the seeds of the thrill of the search are sown, the collector is on his way."

Post—like anyone with an astute sense of style—was also inspired by an accessory's history. For us, knowing the historical influences that shaped an accessory's design gives it added depth and character. It means that you can admire an elegant, long-necked Pompeian vase and know that its shape was rediscovered in the latter part of the 18th century after the buried city was excavated.

Power and provenance?

Accessories can take on added caché if they are extremely rare or have an A-list pedigree. Perhaps the ultimate "power accessory" would be to own a

Fabergé egg. A Russian oil tycoon made international news two years ago when he paid an undisclosed sum for nine eggs from the Forbes family. (Pre-auction estimates ranged from US\$80 to US\$120 million!) Other accessories, become invaluable if someone famous owned them. At Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis' estate sale in 1996, her costume triple-strand pearl necklace sold for US \$211,500 (estimate US\$ 500-\$700), while a simple Tiffany silver tape measure monogrammed "JBK" sold for US\$48,875 (estimate US\$500-\$700). Always have confidence in the choices you make and how you choose to display them. Experiment intelligently, mixing styles. For smaller collectibles, like Limoges boxes, showcase them in a beautiful curio, étagère or pagoda-style stand. Use pedestals for large-scale busts, porcelains, or other impressive objets d'art. Treat these as museum pieces, and they will add instant drama to your room.

If appropriate, don't shy away from whimsical embellishments, like animal-print throw pillows, mirrors framed with golden putti or candelabras decorated with playful monkeys. The latter was a popular animal motif from ancient Egypt to 18th-century France, especially with rococo artists like Huet and Watteau. Playful and mischievous, the monkeys are often parodying human behaviours. Other accessories that telegraph their message without words are eggs and pineapples. With their pleasing, organic shape, eggs symbolize creation and life while pineapples are considered symbols of luck, good fortune and hospitality.

A life long endeavour

Assemble accessories in interesting arrangements by mixing different heights and textures. On a side table you might place an architectural column lamp, with a Chinese pillow box alongside a collection of photos with 17th-century-inspired ornate Spanish frames. Accessorize walls with ornate mirrors, sconces and vibrant art, to immediately breathe life and personality into a room. Your lifelong goal may be to create a gracious and gentle environment, but as wisely said by Ralph Waldo Emerson: "The ornaments of our house are the friends that frequent it." ■

Wallace Shaw, ARIDO, IDC, and Nick Pezzo are the principals of Shaw-Pezzo and Associates, resource of exquisitely crafted home furnishings, artwork, lighting, and accessories. Shaw and Pezzo also offer world-class interior design services.

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